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**Testimony of Mary Oster**

in Support of HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood

Senator McCrory, Representative Curry, Ranking members Berthel and McCarty and members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood.

My name is Mary Oster and I am the Early Childhood Coordinator for the City of Norwalk. I live and work in Norwalk where I support families with young children and center-based and family childcare programs. I am also a staff person for the Norwalk Early Childhood Council and a member of the CT Early Childhood Alliance and the Child Care for CT's Future coalition.

I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is the primary issue facing the early care and education industry. The rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff.

The mean salary of a child care educator with a decade of experience is about \$30,000 in Connecticut. Child care educators are expected to be well-educated, but many earn starting salaries that are lower than fast food workers. I hear from Norwalk providers every day that their staff has left for the public schools, Amazon, McDonalds and more. These educators are in the brain building business and deserve to be paid what their similarly credentialed public school counterparts are paid.

If programs cannot find qualified staff and pay them fairly, they cannot keep their doors open. This is the workforce behind the workforce, without childcare programs parents cannot work. Without a workforce our state is facing an economic crisis.

While this bill is a good start to fairly compensating the childcare workforce, it is missing the way in which this will be paid for. I urge you to support increased funding for the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families already face.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.